

Afghan helicopter-maintenance staff starts training under NATO-Russia project (26 Apr. 2012)

The first training course for ten Afghan helicopter-maintenance staff got underway at the OAO Novosibirsk Aircraft Repair Plant on 1 April 2012. The 90-day course is taking place in the framework of the Helicopter Maintenance Trust Fund project, which was launched by the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) in April 2011 to build capacity in the Afghan Air Force (AAF) to operate its helicopter fleet more effectively. The AAF currently operates 36 Mi-17 and 8 Mi-35 helicopters. Such aircraft are essential for the safe movement of troops and supplies in remote regions, which have poor transportation infrastructure, extreme climatic and environmental conditions, and the added risk of attack from insurgents. The plant in Novosibirsk, established in 1941, has been selected to serve as the main training centre for Afghan maintenance personnel under the project. It has extensive experience in repairing helicopters, as well as a long and successful track record of training maintenance personnel from numerous countries across the globe.

Tailored training

Training will initially focus on the maintenance of Mi-17s. A specific curriculum, based on three certified courses, has been developed to meet the AAF's needs. It covers specializations such as the maintenance of helicopters engines, armaments, avionics, instrumentation, radio equipment and electrical equipment. It is expected that a total of some 30 Afghan maintenance personnel will receive training under the project over the next two years. Training will consist of both classroom instruction using a computer-based system and practical, on-the-job training in production units and laboratories. It will be conducted with the help of Dari interpreters and the translation into Dari of all related technical documentation is foreseen. The training offered under this project is complementary to other aircraft-maintenance capacity-building initiatives underway on the ground in Afghanistan, provided by contractors such as Defense Technology Inc., Lockheed Martin and Northrop Grumman.

The Trust Fund project

The NRC Helicopter Trust Fund project was officially launched in March 2011 at the NRC Ministerial meeting in Berlin with Germany acting as the lead nation and the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA) serving as the project's executing agent. The project aims to provide the AAF with a much-needed maintenance and repair capacity, including spare parts and technical training. During his opening statement at the NRC Ministerial meeting in Berlin, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen underscored the importance of the project. "This is tangible proof that working together brings real security benefits," he said. Financial and in-kind contributions to the Trust Fund project by Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Russia, Turkey and the United States amounts to approximately 23 million US dollars.